

Lesson One

Olive branch (An offer of peace and reconciliation)

Examples:

- *Many of the Labour leader's own party were up in arms over his refusal to support and thank the armed forces for their service. He has offered an **olive branch** to his detractors by promising them a greater say in policy decisions, but the party is clearly riven with conflict on many issues.*
- *When push comes to shove, I'm hopeful that the management will hold out an **olive branch** to the striking train drivers. The slate should be wiped clean so that there is no more of this "us and them" nonsense.*

To go the whole hog (To do something completely and not just partially: informal)

Examples:

- **A:** *It looks like your paintbrush has a mind of its own. I thought you were just going to do the kitchen.*
B: *I was, but then I had second thoughts and decided to **go the whole hog** and paint the entire downstairs. It will give the place a well-needed boost.*
- *If we club together, we can probably afford to **go the whole hog** and book the restaurant all for ourselves. This place is tailor-made for us.*

A chink in one's armour (One small weakness in a person or their argument which makes them open to attack or criticism)

Examples:

- *I feel we should've had the match sewn up by half time, but unfortunately they found **a chink in our armour**: the goalkeeper. Woeful!*
- *Our lawyers have been sifting through the evidence but cannot find **a chink in** the defending company's **armour**. It's no wonder they are being very woolly on how they intend to present our case in court.*

To cry out for (To be in desperate need of something—*note that the subject is generally not a person, but an organisation, object or situation*)

Examples:

- A: *The NHS (National Health Service) is not fit for purpose and is **crying out for** root and branch reform. This should not be done in piecemeal fashion; we need to go the whole hog and wipe the slate clean. The system ought to be far more tailored to the professional requirements of doctors and nurses rather than managers.*
B: *Totally agree. You're preaching to the converted here.*
- A: *This room is **crying out for** some colour and modern furnishing. I suggested subtle green wallpaper, but it didn't register with Jenny. On second thoughts, maybe red?*
B: *RED? You've definitely got a screw loose.*

Scathing (Bitterly and severely critical)

Examples:

- *She launched a **scathing** attack on the President as a result of his comments about women, which she said were demeaning in the extreme. His offensive responses in Tweets came back thick and fast. They will backfire on him one of these days.*
- *Substituting our best player in the team ten minutes before full time, when we were one-nil down, came in for some **scathing** criticism from the fans. Our opponents then scored another one almost immediately, cruising to a two-nil victory. The bright start at the beginning of the season we enjoyed has proved to be a false dawn.*

To waver

i. (To be indecisive, unable to make up one's mind)

Examples:

- A: *I don't know whether to go for the onion soup or the fish cake; I'm **wavering** between the two. Or maybe not have a starter?*
B: *You're so flaky; it just drives me nuts. Make up your mind!*
- *It's about time he put his money where his mouth is and got on with delivering on his promise. He dithers and **wavers** too much, and it's pushing up the cost.*

ii. (to weaken in one's feelings or beliefs—*often used in the negative with “never”*)

Examples:

- *His love for her never **wavered** even though in many respects they were poles apart.*
- *I think his recent article in The Times was a ploy to get more funding for the arts from the lottery Commission. He seems to be a person whose commitment to the cause is unlikely to **waver**.*

To bend/lean over backwards (To make a huge effort to help someone or accommodate their wishes; *informal*)

Examples:

- *We've tailored everything to her particular taste; **bent over backwards** in fact to give her what she wants. But she's so flaky, changing her mind every five minutes.*
- **A:** *There is a dearth of good state schools where we live, and so we have **leant over backwards** to get Sofia into a highly sought-after private school nearer the centre of town. She got in, thankfully, but the sting in the tail is...*
B: *The eye-watering school fees?*
A: *Spot on!*

“It goes without saying” (“It's obvious and I don't need to say it, but I will anyway”)

Examples:

- *We are sorry to see you leave the company but understand that you feel now is the time to move on. It has been a sheer pleasure working with you. And **it goes without saying** that we wish you all the best for the future.*
- *The Government regrets losing the legal case in the Supreme Court, but **it goes without saying** that we will honour and respect the decision by their lordships. This country sets the benchmark for the entire world on how a democracy should function with an independent judiciary. We do ourselves proud!*

To work miracles (To do the impossible—informal: often used in the negative after “can’t/cannot”)

Examples:

- **A:** *Your son is on track to make a slight improvement in his exams marks this year, but we cannot **work miracles**. Unless he rolls his sleeves up, he won’t get into Cambridge.*
B: *I realise that, Mr Wilson, but he thinks he’s got it all sewn up. What can I do?*
- *The new woman at the helm of the charity will be expected to **work miracles**. Interestingly, not everybody is a great fan of some of the proposals she’s already made. And it’s not going to be a walk in the park to win these people over.*

A flash in the pan (A thing or person who has a brief period of great success which will never be repeated—often used in sport or the world of entertainment)

Examples:

- **A:** *We were doing so well at the beginning of the rugby season, but it was clearly just **a flash in the pan**.*
B: *Indeed it was. I have serious misgivings about this manager and I fear more heavy defeats are lurking round the corner.*
- **A:** *Do you rate Patricia Colman as a budding, lead violinist?*
B: *No, not at all. She’s just **a flash in the pan** and poses no threat whatsoever to the current violinists playing the London circuit.*

Lesson Two

Back to the drawing board (A situation indicating that one has to start planning again because the original scheme/idea/proposal has not worked—*very often used with “to go”*)

Examples:

- **A:** *The old accounting system we were using was crying out for change. How is the new one coming along so far?*
B: *I’m not a fan, I have to say. We could do with something tailor-made specifically for our type of business. It’s **back to the drawing board**, I’m afraid.*
- *Our architects are actually right in the thick of the action as regards London office development. They’ve asked us if we want our current offices re-designed or for them to create something from scratch. We’ve been wavering, but have finally come round to the idea of going the whole hog and having something brand new built. And if we don’t like what they come up with, they’ll have to go **back to the drawing board**...literally!*

To drag on (To continue for too long at a very slow pace)

Examples:

- *We leant over backwards to get the job finished by Christmas so everyone could enjoy their holidays, but unfortunately it now looks like **dragging on** until after Easter. The builders have been pulling the wool over our eyes trying to blame the weather for the delay.*
- **A:** *Winter this year seems to be **dragging on** for ages.*
B: *That goes without saying in Scotland.*

Full-on

- i.** (Full strength, total: *informal*)

Examples:

- *The situation is crying out for a **full-on** investigation, not just the usual woolly, shambolic rubbish. The press have been scathing in their condemnation and need to be mollified.*

- *Let's go the whole hog and order the **full-on** English breakfast. Everyone on board with that?*

ii. (Very keen and enthusiastic: *informal—usually in a way that is annoying to others*)

Examples:

- **A:** *I know you don't suffer fools gladly; so what was wrong with this Alex bloke you had a date with last week?*
B: *Nothing really; nice guy, but...*
A: *I knew there would be a sting in the tail.*
B: *A bit too **full-on** for me.*
- *My sister has a dog: Irish setter. Beautiful, affectionate but keeps her on her toes. Very **full-on** with all people and small dogs; has a few screws loose, definitely; just like my sister in fact. The two are tailor-made for each other.*

To go off the boil (To lose interest, to become less enthusiastic; to be not quite as good as one used to be)

Examples:

- *He has, on numerous occasions over the years, unsuccessfully offered an olive branch in an attempt to break the ice with his sister; they fell out with each other many years ago when they didn't see eye to eye over their father's will. But now his enthusiasm to rekindle sibling relations has **gone off the boil**. He just can't be bothered any more.*
- **A:** *I hope Mario Fabini doesn't turn out to be just a flash in the pan. He seems to have **gone off the boil** in recent matches, don't you think?*
B: *I do. I think he finds playing in the 2nd division a bit demeaning for a player of his reputation. He needs to compete against teams who will keep him on his toes.*

To come on in leaps and bounds (To improve dramatically; to make rapid progress)

Examples:

- *He has **come on in leaps and bounds** since he first played at Wimbledon as a junior. Now he has very few chinks in his armour and his serve is unparalleled in the modern game.*

- The whole class has **come on in leaps and bounds** this term. Mrs Mason, the form teacher, has worked miracles with them. I do hope this success snowballs so that they all do the school proud in their summer exams.

To grind to a halt/to come to a grinding halt (To move increasingly slowly and then stop; to come to an end—note the past of “grind” is “ground”)

Examples:

- My old car, which I have often thought has a mind of its own, finally **ground to a halt** yesterday on the way over to my mum’s flat. My partner has been promising to buy me a new one... and now it’s time for him to put his money where his mouth is.
- I feel that the company is crying out for a new management team; otherwise our plans are going to **come to a grinding halt** and we will have to go back to the drawing board...again!.

Lily-livered (Weak and cowardly)

Examples:

- I don’t like this **lily-livered** approach of offering olive branches when they were the ones trying to stitch us up. We should turn the tables on them and not encourage them to think we have a chink in our armour. It is very much an “us and them” situation and we have to show “them” who is right.
- A: Susan gives as good as she gets and will stand her ground with anyone. I can vouch for that.
B: So, not **lily-livered** like her brother, then? I’ve always had misgivings about him.

To foil

i. (To prevent criminal or undesirable activity from succeeding—often used in the passive)

Example:

- Fortunately for the police, the gang was riven with conflict amongst its leaders so that their plans to rob the bank were easily **foiled**. It goes without saying that the staff were extremely grateful to the police.

ii. (To frustrate the plans of a competitor or enemy)

Example:

- *Their attempts to counter attack were **foiled** by John Dale, the young centre back who has come on in leaps and bounds since joining the club last season. And what is helpful is that all his teammates have bent over backwards to settle him in.*

Foothold (A strong and secure position from which progress is likely to be made—often used with “to give/get/gain” and usually followed by “in”)

Examples:

- *Mother: Doing an internship in the summer holidays for this prestigious City firm will give Daniel a **foothold** in the property business if he wants to pursue this line of work after he leaves university. This company might be happy to have him on board; you never know!
Father: Hope you're right; otherwise it's back to the drawing board. You shouldn't keep spoon-feeding him like you do.
Mother: Oh you're so negative; I shudder at the thought of him ending up like you, I really do.*
- *We are doing our very best to gain/get a **foothold** in the Chinese clothes market with a new range of men's shirts. Our attempts in the past have been a bit hit and miss, if I'm honest. But now I'm confident we're on the right track.*

“...the dust settles” (...things quieten/calm down)

Examples:

- *A: Her divorce proceedings seem to be dragging on for ages. Her lawyers are bending over backwards to meet John's demands. She just hopes **the dust settles** quickly so that she can move on.
B: And meet another flaky, lily-livered man?*
- *Many women are up in arms about the new maternity leave rules to be phased in over the next two years; but once **the dust has settled**, I think they'll see how they could work in their favour and will not pose any threat at all to their jobs.*

Lesson Three

To carp on (To complain all the time—*usually unnecessarily*)

Examples:

- *Why is he **carping on** the whole time about the way this place is run, when he is the boss? He should practise what he preaches.*
- **A:** *I don't know why you had to cave in to their demands so pathetically; it was lily-livered of you. You should have stood your ground with them.*
B: *Oh stop **carping on!** Once the dust settles, everything will be fine, you'll see.*

To come full circle (To be back where one started; to return to a past situation)

Examples:

- **A:** *This series of tedious meetings has dragged on for over two months now and all we've done is **come full circle**; a sheer waste of time!*
B: *Oh yes they certainly love meetings in this company, and meetings about meetings. I think it's a thinly-veiled ploy to make us think they are actually leaning over backwards to listen to our complaints, when in reality they couldn't care less.*
- *Darren's passion for travelling abroad for work appears to have gone off the boil. So I'm delighted to say he will be **coming full circle** and settling back in Manchester, where he grew up. Anyway the demand for his type of work is drying up in many parts of the world.*

A (whole) host of (A large number of people or things)

Examples:

- *I tried to come up with **a (whole) host of** reasons not to go to the party, but it fell on deaf ears. My wife said I had to go. I'm just not a great fan of either Jim or Rebecca. Too full on, both of them; jumping and dancing around as if they were teenagers.*
- *It seems like **a (whole) host of** people have got their wires crossed here; so don't you all gang up on me please.*

To woo (To try to attract people to one's cause or political campaign; to seek the favour or support of someone; to try to get the attention/admiration of women)

Examples:

- *He has been trying to **woo** the grassroots members of his party with his promise to increase employment. But to be fair to him, he has also been honest to admit that even though his commitment will not waver, he cannot work miracles.*
- *Ever since she ditched her previous agent and severed all contact with him, she has been **wooed** by a whole host of modelling agencies who have offered her staggering sums of money to work for their clients. I hope this doesn't turn out to be another false dawn for her.*
- *A: I hope you don't mind me saying, but the after shave you're using is a bit too full-on in my opinion. I don't think you'll **woo** many young ladies with that one if I'm honest.
B: Oh really? Thanks for telling me. In that case it's back to the drawing board.*

Haphazard (Without a plan/organisation; lacking any method or order)

Examples:

- *A: I'm hoping that once the dust settles, we'll reap the rewards of Jack's planning.
B: What planning? It all seems so **haphazard** and unjoined-up to me. I can't see how we're ever going to get a foothold in the London start-up scene with Jack at the helm.*
- *Defending seems to be so **haphazard** at Arsenal. I thought we were for a time improving this part of our game, but we seem to have come full circle and are now back to where we were last season. Shambolic!*

To wing it (To speak or act without preparation; to improvise; to make it look as though you know what you are doing, when you don't: **informal**)

Examples:

- *A: I managed to foil their attempts to take over the meeting by telling them in no uncertain terms that their inconsiderate actions would backfire on them. But to be*

honest I was making it up as I went along, not really knowing what was going to come out of my mouth next.

B: So you were **winging it**? Brilliant!

- *It's touch and go whether we'll be able to put on this play. Half the actors haven't bothered to learn their lines. They think they'll be able to **wing it** on the night. I shudder to think what theatre has come to in this country, I really do.*

A drop in the ocean (A tiny amount in comparison to what is needed—usually money)

Examples:

- *The National Health Service (NHS) is crying out for more funding. The government say they are investing an extra £10 million, but this is **a drop in the ocean** to what is needed; more like £10 billion. Many hospitals say they will come to a grinding halt without more cash.*
- *We will manage to save a few thousand pounds in storage costs by changing distributors, but really it's just **a drop in the ocean**. The clock is ticking for us, I'm afraid. Debts are mounting up.*

Scaremongering (The spreading of stories that cause public fear; exaggerating how bad something is/will be for the public in order to create fear: noun and adjective)

Examples:

- *There are a whole host of very good reasons why the UK should have stayed in the EU, but claiming, as many politicians on the Remain side have done vigorously, that Brexit poses a threat to world peace is **scaremongering** at its very worst.*
- *The economists...you know, the clever people who've never had a proper job in their lives...keep carping on about the economy grinding to a halt. **Scaremongering** talk, that's what it is.*

To beef up (To become heavier and stronger; to strengthen/give more substance to something)

Examples:

- A: *Wow! Your son's really **beefed up** since I last saw him; what've you been feeding him on?*

- B: *Nothing different. It's just nature taking its course. He also does a lot of fitness training; tends to go the whole hog, my boy, when it comes to physical exercise.*
- *In order to foil any attempt by the defendant's solicitor to influence the judge, we need to **beef up** our case with more reliable evidence; we just can't wing it and hope for the best.*

Anecdotal (Based on the spoken word/personal accounts rather than factual evidence, and therefore not necessarily true)

Examples:

- *After a year of research we have come full circle and still have nothing more than flaky, **anecdotal** evidence to support our case.*
- *Political correspondent: As I speak, politicians from both sides of the House of Commons are trying to flesh out an agreement. And my sources tell me, only **anecdotally**, of course, that the government will have to water down their proposals quite considerably.*

Chapter Seven in Use

TEACHER'S RESIGNATION LETTER

Dear Brian

It is with great sadness that I am writing to you today submitting six months' notice of my resignation as a senior teacher of the school as from the end of the summer term in July.

*For the past year I've been covering for Carol Shaw's Geography classes while she is off sick, in a subject which I haven't studied since I was at school myself. I've **leant over backwards** to help the students in her classes, but they can see I'm just **winging it**. I cannot be expected to **work miracles**, Brian!*

*And there are a **whole host of** other reasons why I feel I can no longer teach at the school. It is true that the young graduate teacher, Robert Clarkson, has **come on leaps and bounds** since he started last year. He will never **waver** in his dedication to the children under his charge, and he's not just a **flash in the pan**; I can vouch for that. But most of the other new teachers you have recently **wooded** to the school by promising a competitive salary and quick promotion are barely literate. I know you think I keep **carping on** about this, but it's important, Brian. I need hardly remind you that the last OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) report for the school...a **full-on** investigation... was **scathing**; lesson planning in particular was described as "**haphazard**".*

*On a personal note, I feel the school is **crying out** for change...but not with me there! I had been thinking for quite a while of just going part time but then I said to myself; "**Go the whole hog**. Throw caution to the wind and do something different". So I've decided to open a cake shop in the countryside with my daughter. Can't wait!*

It goes without saying that you will have my unstinting support until my departure.

No hard feelings, Brian.

Yours

Alison

TWO DIRECTORS DISCUSS THE PROPOSED TAKEOVER OF THEIR COMPANY

LINDA: *Derek, we need to talk urgently about our tactics in the Weldon Assurance business...*

DEREK: *Ah yes, Linda, I thought that's what would be on the agenda today. What's the latest?*

LINDA: *This is entirely between you and me for the moment, Derek...*

DEREK: *Of course, I understand completely.*

LINDA: *Well, up till last week, it looked as if everything was going to go smoothly, but then negotiations suddenly **ground to a halt**, so now we're **back to the drawing board** to see how to proceed.*

DEREK: *Yes, I did hear one or two rumours... Well, in my view we shouldn't let things **drag on** like this, we can't **waver** too much on this one – we need to be decisive!*

LINDA: *Agreed! I mean, I look at it in terms of a battle - they're looking for **a chink in our armour** but we're going to try and **foil** their 'attack'.*

DEREK: *Or maybe we shouldn't react aggressively, perhaps we should offer them **an olive branch** and cool things down a bit for a while... and then go for a better deal a little further down the line.*

LINDA: *Hmm, there are two sides to the picture, I think. They're obviously trying to **beef up** their finances by getting **a foothold** in our business but what makes me angry is when they say that our terms are too high – but for a big company like that with the money they have, I think it's just **a drop in the ocean**, personally.*

DEREK: *But they did have a bad year last year, when their figures were well down. I know they started off really well but things **went** quickly **off the boil** after the middle of May, so I'm sure they're not in such a strong position as they originally thought...*

LINDA: *And then of course, there are all these rumours about them pursuing redundancies if the deal does go through – that does make me feel a bit jittery, to be honest - what do you reckon?*

DEREK: *I reckon it's just **scaremongering**, nothing more – I know there's been some talk about it, but I don't think they'll be brave enough to go that far, at least in the short term. I mean, it's just that, rumours, I know the unions have been making noise about it, but there's nothing more than **anecdotal** evidence to support their case for the moment.*

LINDA: *Hmm, being 'brave enough', I'm not so sure... I mean, wouldn't put it past that Thomas Ryan at Weldon. He's a **lily-livered** so-and-so deep down, so for the moment he's playing all that down. He's afraid of the union's reaction, and has been making a few positive noises towards them, but later on, **when the dust settles**, I wouldn't put it past him...*

DEREK: *Well, in any case, I think we're in a much better position than we would have been in at the start of last year, when we were suffering financially and they were*

gloating, but things *have come full circle* since their sudden collapse in May last year so I think we can hold out for a better offer from them than is on the table right now...

LINDA: *You're right, Derek, and if that doesn't work, it will be time for you to go on one of your magic charm offensives.*

DEREK: *Then we really will be doomed!*

Chapter Seven: Exercise

CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORD FROM THOSE IN PURPLE

Answers on page 140

1. His first book was excellent, and all his others are just as good; he's not just a ^a(drop in the ocean/flash in the pan/olive branch/foothold). His latest novel is about how the British secret service manage to ^b(carp/wool/waver/foil) a terrorist cyber attack. There's a lot of blood and murder; I loved it! But it's not for the ^c(lily-livered/scathing/anecdotal/olive branches).
2. A: If we want to get a ^a(scaremongering/olive branch/foothold/drawing board) into this company, we are going to have to look for flaws in their set up, just to see if they have any ^b(anecdotes/footholds/scaremongering/chinks in their armour).

B: But we don't want to come over as too gung-ho and aggressive; we should be ^c(wooing/scaremongering/carping/scathing) them into doing a deal with us rather than putting them off.
3. The Government think that by slightly reducing the interest rate on student loans, they are going to get young people to vote for them. But there are ^a(a whole host of reasons/chinks in their armour/anecdotes/haphazards) why this is not going to happen; mostly because it will make hardly any difference to the huge amounts of debt the students will have accumulated over 20 years or so. The proposed interest rate reduction is therefore just a ^b(full circle/a drop in the ocean/grinding halt/they can wing it). So the Prime Minister and her cabinet need to go ^c(full circle/the whole hog/without saying/back to the drawing board) and come up with something more radical.
4. A: I think Amelia's doing really well in her studies now; she's certainly ^a(crying out for help/gone the whole hog/come on in leaps and bounds/come full circle) since the start of term, when, to be honest, she was just ^b(winging it/scathing/grinding to a halt/going back to the drawing board).

B: I agree, and now she has the opposite problem: she's working so hard that there is a very real danger she might ^c(beef it up/go off the boil/wing it/cry out for help) by the time her exams come round in the summer.
5. It's funny how life ^a(goes the whole hog/works miracles/goes off the boil/comes full circle) and all the things one's parents used to ^b(cry out/carp on/foil/waver) about prove to be completely true. Above all, we should aim never to ^c(wing it/go the whole hog/waver/beef oneself up) in our determination to succeed.

6. A: It really annoys me when as soon as you go into a shop, a sales assistant says “Hi, how are you today? Can I help?” Too ^a(*haphazard/full-on/scathing/anecdotal*) for my liking.
 B I feel exactly the same; so irritating! But I have a suggestion: next time that happens to you, smile and answer them in Russian. It ^b(*works miracles/grinds to a halt/goes the whole hog/leans over backwards*), I can promise you. Of course, ^c(*when the dust settles/it’s purely anecdotal/it goes without saying/it foils*) that if the sales assistant is actually Russian, you’ll be in trouble and wish you’d just said “No thank you” when you came in.
 A: That’s the most stupid piece of advice you’ve ever come up with.
7. My lovely, kind dad gave me £1,000 to invest in the stock market. At first, I told myself I’d better tread carefully and invest only a small portion of this, but then I said to myself “You only live once so go ^a(*with an olive branch/full circle/in leaps and bounds/the whole hog*)”. So I invested all £1,000 in an Australian gold mining company which I’d heard... only ^b(*haphazardly/anecdotal/scathingly/by scaremongering*)... had great potential. But a few minutes after pressing the “Deal” button, I found online an investment magazine which featured a ^c(*scathing/anecdotal/lily-livered/haphazard*) review of this company’s recent trade history. Oh dear, too late!
8. A: So, how have your daily fitness training sessions been going? Your arm muscles certainly look ^a(*lily-livered/off the boil/beefed up/wavered*) since I last saw you six months ago.
 B: I think you need glasses. Those sessions ^b(*went without saying/came full circle/went the whole hog/came to a grinding halt*) after a few weeks. I hated every minute of them. I’ve never known in my life for time to ^c(*carp on/drag on/foil/wing it*) so slowly.
9. Since our row over business last year, my brother hasn’t spoken to me. I’ve ^a(*come to a grinding halt/cried out/bent over backwards/carped on*) to try to contact him, but he never returns my calls. As an ^b(*olive branch/haphazard/scaremongering/lily-livered*) I’ve offered, in several emails (unanswered), to give him whatever he wants from the business, but I’ve had no response whatsoever. Just after our argument I thought once ^c(*there’s a grinding halt/the dust had settled/we had gone back to the drawing board/we’d gone the whole hog*) we’d be close again, but it hasn’t turned out like that at all. Pity!
10. In the Brexit debate the British people are ^a(*carping on/coming full circle/going the whole hog/crying out*) for some practical common sense. Instead, all they’ve been getting is ^b(*scaremongering/winging it/anecdotes/ footholds*) from the Remainers and chaotic, ^c(*scaremongering/anecdotal/haphazard/wavering*) organisation from the Brexiteers in the government.